Muong language

Muong (*thiểng Mường*[3]) is a group of dialects spoken by the Mường people of Vietnam. They are in the Austroasiatic language family and closely related to Vietnamese. According to Phan (2012), the Mường dialects are not a single language, or even most closely related to each other, but rather are an ethnically defined and paraphyletic taxon.[4]

Mường dialects are primarily spoken in mountainous regions of the northern Vietnamese provinces of Hòa Bình, Thanh Hóa, Vĩnh Phúc, Yên Bái, Sơn La, and Ninh Bình.

Mường has all six tones of Vietnamese; however, the *nặng* (heavy) tone is present only in Phú Thọ and Thanh Hóa provinces while in Hòa Bình Province, it is merged with the *sắc* (sharp) tone.[5]

Thiểng Mường	
Native to	Vietnam
Region	west of Hanoi
Native speakers	1.1 million (1999 census)[1]
Language family	Austroasiatic - Vietic - Viet–Muong **Thiểng Mường**
Writing system	Latin
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	`mtq`
Glottolog	`muon1246` (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/muon1246)[2]

Contents

Writing system

Mường had no written form until Western academics in the 20th century developed a provisional alphabet based on a modified Vietnamese alphabet, including additional consonants like *w* and allowing different consonant pairs and final consonants than Vietnamese.[3]

In September 2016, the People's Committee of Hòa Bình Province adopted resolution 2295/QĐ-UBND, specifying a new Mường alphabet by Prof. Bùi Hiền to be used in instruction within the province. The alphabet consists of 28 letters and four tone marks.[6] The provincial Communist Party mouthpiece, *Hòa Bình điện tử* (Muong: *Wá Bính diện tứ*) began publishing its electronic edition in Mường in addition to Vietnamese and English, surprising some readers with the unusual orthography.[7]

Phonology

Consonant inventory

The following table details the consonants of those dialects that show a full voiced-voiceless distinction in the stops (being Mường Bi, Mường Thành, Mường Động, and Ba Trại).[8] The spelling is given in italics.

		Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasal		m /m/	n /n/	nh /ɲ/	ng /ŋ/	
Stop	voiceless	p /p/	t /t/	ch /c/	c /k/	
	aspirated	ph /pʰ/	th /tʰ/		kh /kʰ/	
	voiced	b /b/	đ /d/		g /g ~ ɣ/	
Fricative	voiceless		x /s/			h /h/
	voiced	v/w/o/u /β/	d/gi/i/y /z ~ j/			
Lateral			l, tl /l, tl ~ kl/			

The Mường Vang dialect completely lacks the distinction between the voiced and unvoiced stop pairs /p b/, /t d/, /k ɡ/, having only the voiceless one of each pair. The Mường Khói and Mường Ống dialects have the full voiceless series, but lack /ɡ/ among the voiced stops. The Thạch Sơn dialect on the other hand lacks /p/.

Furthermore, the Mường Khói dialect lacks the aspirated alveolar /tʰ/, but has a /hr/ instead. This dialect is also described as having the labio-velars /kʷ/ and /kʷʰ/.

All of these consonants can appear syllable-initially. At the end of syllables only the nasals /m n ɲ ŋ/, the voiceless stops /p t c k/, the lateral /l/, and the glides /j w/ are allowed.[9] Of these phonemes, the palatals /c ɲ/ have been analysed as glide + velar /ʲk ʲŋ/.[10] Furthermore, the distribution of syllable-final /c ɲ l/ seems to be more restricted than the distribution of the other final consonants.[11]

Vowel inventory

The vowel inventory is given in the following table. It appears to be quite uniform among the different dialects.[8] Two of the vowels (/ɤ/ and /a/) can be long or short.

	Front	Back	
		unrounded	rounded
Close	i /i/	ư /ɯ/	u /u/
Mid	ê /e/	ơ, â /ɤː, ɤ/	ô /o/
Open	e /ɛ/	a, ă /aː, a/	o /ɔ/

Apart from these monophthongs, there are also three diphthongs /iə, ɯə, uə/.

References

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3. Hà Quang Phùng 2012, p. 1.

4. Phan, John D. (2012). "Mường is not a subgroup: Phonological evidence for a paraphyletic taxon in the Viet-Muong sub-family" (http://www.mksjournal.org/mksj40.pdf) (PDF). *Mon-Khmer Studies*. **40**: 1–18.
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8. Nguyễn Văn Tài 1982, I.2
9. Nguyễn Văn Tài 1982, II.3.3.2
10. Nguyễn Văn Tài 1982, II.3.3.1
11. Nguyễn Văn Tài 1982, II.3.3.3

Further reading

- Hà Quang Phùng (2012-09-06). "Tìm hiểu về ngữ pháp tiếng Mường (Thim hiếu wuê ngử pháp thiểng Mường)" (https://web.archive.org/web/20160919225200/http://d.dathoc.com/uploa ds/resources/597/521047/preview.swf) [Understanding Muong grammar]. (in Vietnamese and Muong). Thanh Sơn–Phú Thọ Province Continuing Education Center. Archived from the original (http://d.dathoc.com/uploads/resources/597/521047/preview.swf) (FlashPaper) on September 19, 2016. (More (http://d.dathoc.com/uploads/resources/597/521048/preview.swf))
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External links

- *Wǎ Bính diện tứ* (http://baohoabinh.com.vn/mu/) – online newspaper in Mường (in Muong)